

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 027432
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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 027432

FOR AMBASSADOR WRIGGINS FROM AMBASSADOR RICHARDSON

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PLOS

SUBJECT: LOS - PRESIDENT AMERASINGHE

REF: MOSCOW 1296

1. I SAW AMERASINGHE AND ZULETA IN NEW YORK JANUARY 30 AND DISCUSSED WITH THEM THE STATUS OF AMERASINGHE.
 2. I TOLD AMERASINGHE ABOUT THE DISCUSSION IN THE GROUP OF FIVE AT MOSCOW CONCERNING HIS STATUS (MOSCOW'S 1296). I ALSO TOLD AMERASINGHE THAT I THOUGHT HIS LEGAL POSITION ON CONTINUING IN OFFICE WAS SOUND IN LIGHT OF THE UN LEGAL ADVISER'S OPINION THAT HE MIGHT CONTINUE WITHOUT BEING A MEMBER OF THE SRI LANKA DELEGATION; AND THE RULES OF PROCEDURE WHICH IN EFFECT PERMIT THE OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE TO REMAIN IN OFFICE FOR THE DURATION OF THE
- CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 027432

CONFERENCE, UNLESS THEY ARE INCAPACITATED OR REMOVED BY THE CONFERENCE ITSELF. I ALSO SAID I BELIEVED THAT THE POSITION OF SOME DELEGATIONS (VIZ CHILE) THAT HE SHOULD BE A MEMBER OF THE SRI LANKA DELEGATION COULD BE TURNED AROUND WITH SOUND ARGUMENTS.

3. AMERASINGHE EXPRESSED HIS GREAT APPRECIATION FOR OUR

EFFORTS. HE NOTED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER THINKS IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR HIM TO CONTINUE TO SERVE ON THE SRI LANKA DELEGATION, LARGELY OUT OF CONCERN FOR THE FEELINGS OF FERNANDO WHO MIGHT FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH AMERASINGHE ON HIS DELEGATION. AMERASINGHE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT FERNANDO SAID HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO HAVE HIM ON THE DELEGATION. AMERASINGHE OBSERVED THAT AS A TECHNICAL MATTER HE COULD PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SERVE IN THE FACE OF SCATTERED OPPOSITION; THE CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE TO VOTE HIM OUT IF HE REFUSED TO STEP DOWN. HOWEVER, HIS SELF-RESPECT WOULD NOT PERMIT HIM TO CONTINUE IF THERE WERE ANY SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION. HE WOULD NOT QUIT IN THE FACE OF VERY LIMITED OBJECTION TO HIS CONTINUING AS PRESIDENT. I SUGGESTED THAT ZEGERS WHO PROBABLY WAS THE KEY TO THE MATTER MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO MAKE A MILD PROTEST IN CONFERENCE AND THEN EXPRESS READINESS TO GO ALONG ON THE BASIS OF A SERIES OF ARGUMENTS SHOWING WHY IT WOULD NOT BE PRECEDENT SETTING. I SAID I WOULD SPEAK TO ZEGERS ALONG THE FOREGOING LINES. FINALLY, AMERASINGHE SAID HE WOULD NOT WISH TO CONDUCT THE FEBRUARY INTERSESSIONALS UNDER FALSE PRETENSES, AND HOPED THE QUESTION OF HIS STATUS COULD BE ESSENTIALLY RESOLVED BEFORE FEBRUARY 6.

4. LATER I SAW ZULETA WHO REQUESTED THAT I NOT SPEAK TO ZEGERS WHO IS CURRENTLY IN SANTIAGO UNTIL HE HAD HAD A CHANCE TO FILL ZEGERS IN ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 027432

ZULETA SUGGESTED HIS OWN SCENARIO FOR HANDLING THE QUESTION OF THE PRESIDENCY WHICH HE NOTED THAT HE HAD NOT DISCUSSED WITH ANYONE AND WAS VERY TENTATIVE. HE PROPOSES TO SPEAK TO EACH OF THE CHAIRMEN OF EACH OF THE REGIONAL GROUPS THIS WEEK TO SECURE THEIR SUPPORT FOR AMERASINGHE CONTINUING TO SERVE IN AN INDEPENDENT CAPACITY, UNAFFILIATED WITH THE SRI LANKA DELEGATION. IF, AS HE EXPECTS, HE GETS A FAVORABLE RESPONSE, HE WILL LEAVE THE MATTER THERE UNTIL THE 7TH SESSION OPENS. A FAVORABLE RESPONSE FROM THE REGIONAL GROUPS CHAIRMEN WOULD, IN HIS VIEW SUFFICE TO GIVE AMERASINGHE THE NECESSARY LEGITIMACY TO CONDUCT THE INTERSESSIONAL MEETINGS, SINCE ALL ATTENDING WOULD KNOW THAT AMERASINGHE HAD BEEN ASSURED OF CONTINUING IN OFFICE.

5. AT THE OPENING OF THE 7TH SESSION, ACCORDING TO ZULETA'S SCENARIO, ONE OF THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENTS WOULD TAKE THE CHAIR AND GIVE THE FLOOR TO ZULETA, WHO WOULD ANNOUNCE ON BEHALF OF THE SYG THAT THE GSL WOULD BE HAPPY IF AMERASINGHE WERE TO CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT. HE WOULD CITE THE LEGAL OPINION OF THE UN LEGAL ADVISER AND THE CONCURRENCE OF THE REGIONAL GROUPS.

6. ZULETA CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE REAL REASON WHY THE GSL WANTED TO DROP AMERASINGHE, AS HE HAD LEARNED

WHEN IN COLOMBO RECENTLY, WAS THAT HE WAS CONSIDERED BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT TO HAVE BEEN TOO EFFECTIVE IN SERVING MADAME BANDARANAIKE. JAYAWARDENE REPORTEDLY THOUGHT AMERASINGHE WHOSE SYMPATHIES ORIGINALLY LAY WITH THE UNP SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SO HELPFUL; HE WAS ONE OF US THE PM REPORTEDLY COMPLAINED. ZULETA UNDERSTOOD THAT THE LATE PRIME MINISTER RELIED HEAVILY ON AMERASINGHE, AND AS A GOOD CIVIL SERVANT HE GAVE HER THE BEST ADVICE AND SUPPORT HE COULD.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 027432

7. COMMENT: WHILE THE CONSIDERATION ZULETA MENTIONED TO ME MAY IN SOME DEGREE HAVE INFLUENCED JAYAWARDENE'S DECISION TO DROP AMERASINGHE, I ASSUME A NUMBER OF OTHER ELEMENTS PROBABLY WEIGHED MORE HEAVILY. IN ANY EVENT, WHAT ZULETA TOLD ME IS OBVIOUSLY THE LINE THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO CIRCULATE IN THE CONFERENCE.

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